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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 0958  
RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI PRIORITY 3913  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: RUSSIANS RENEW PRESSURE FOR U.S. APPEARANCE BY DE  
FACTO ABKHAZ FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: TBILISI 459

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified -- please protect accordingly.

12. (U) This is an action request -- action requested para 5.

13. (SBU) On March 12 Russian PR Churkin, in reaction to negative signals from Washington, renewed his request of last week for U.S. approval of a visa for de facto Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergey Shamba to participate in an "Arria" formula meeting with Security Council members prior to the April 15 renewal of UN Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). The Russians insist that Shamba be given the chance to make an appearance in the U.S. prior to the April 15 renewal of the UNOMIG mandate. They do not propose that Shamba participate directly in Council discussions of UNOMIG or formally address the Security Council, perhaps in recognition of the near unanimous rejection of this proposal by the Friends of the Secretary General in their February 12-13 meeting in Geneva

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(Tbilisi 459). With some annoyance, Churkin said that the Russians were "tired of speaking on behalf of the Abkhaz in the Council" and were looking for a way to shift this responsibility to the Abkhaz themselves. Churkin, who said he had firm instructions to get this done, pressed strongly for U.S. agreement to issue a visa in time for Shamba to come to New York well before the UNOMIG mandate renewal April 15, noting that refusal to accommodate this "reasonable request" for an unofficial meeting with Council members would create greater difficulties in our dealings with this conflict.

14. (SBU) In his earlier approach to us, Churkin indicated that Russia proposes to host an Arria formula meeting in New York to give Shamba a platform to express Abkhaz views. He explained that they seek to give the Council the opportunity to take the Abkhaz position more fully into account in renewing the UNOMIG mandate. (Note: Arria formula meetings are not official meetings of the Security Council. Such "meetings" may be hosted by any member of the Council and invitations are extended by that delegation to all Council members, who may be represented at any level. As such, issuance of visas for non-member participants would be at the discretion of the U.S. End Note.)

15. (SBU) Comment and Action Requested: Although Arria formula meetings are not official meetings of the Council, they have taken on a semi-official status. Council members are not obliged but are expected to send a representative to attend. The Russians seem to be arguing that the Friends Group only rejected the proposal that the Abkhaz be granted

the chance to address the Council in a formal session in connection with the UNOMIG mandate renewal. Russia's proposed Arria formula meeting is thus presented as a compromise. USUN seeks Department guidance on a response to Russian mission.

WOLFF